

# When Homogeneity Calls for Super-Diversity: Rome as a Religious Global City\*

by VALERIA FABRETTI (University of Rome 'Tor Vergata') and  
PIERO VERENI (University of Rome 'Tor Vergata')

## Abstract

This article addresses the way religious diversity is 'taking place' in Rome. In particular, it brings some religious manifestations into a broader understanding of the diversification of religious spaces in the city. Instead of seeing diversity as an unintended consequence of global flows, we trace it back to a sound religious spatial identity. Ever since globalization was set in motion, Rome has functioned as an attracting field of visibility for established religions. At the same time, the city has provided a shared grammar for inflecting diversity into religious idioms. Religious super-diversity as seen in Rome is the combination of a strong local religious identity that acts as a stage where old actors hope to be invited to give new performances and the audience itself is incessantly pushed to tread the boards. The article concludes with a tentative hypothesis that super-diversity may yield to postsecular modes of social life.

**Keywords:** religion, diversity, urban space, postsecular society, globalization, sacred places

## Introduction

Within the context of renewed attention towards the 'spatialization of religion,' the study of cities has become a privileged 'detector' for understanding religious diversity in contemporary secular societies. Although Italy has been researched very little in this context, it offers a rich laboratory in which complex religious and secular processes that are currently taking place can be analyzed.

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\* We dedicate this article to the memory of our friend and colleague Massimo Rosati (1969-2014). We had the privilege of collaborating with him on a number of occasions through the activities of the *Centre for the Study and Documentation of Religions and Political Institutions in Post-Secular Society* (CSPS), the research group he established at the University of Rome Tor Vergata. In his last work, Massimo addressed the relationship between space and religion and suggested how a Durkheimian reading of the sacred 'grammar' can help to understand the specificity of sacred places, trace their difference from social

This article addresses the way religious diversity 'takes place' in Rome. Obviously embedded – not only culturally but also 'spatially' – within Catholicism, the city also hosts a heterogeneous set of non-Catholic presences and places. This heterogeneity is located at the smaller hyper-local scale of worship, but also reveals itself at a macroscopic level, in terms of macro-places of worship whose relevance and links transcend Italian boundaries; this exposed visibility calls for interpretation. Instead of considering diversity as a mere consequence of globalization and

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spaces, and identify the sociological features of *post-secular sanctuaries* (Rosati 2012 and 2015). The idea of a CSPS research project on religious places in Rome was starting to take shape when Massimo unexpectedly passed away. This article is a partial outcome of those first theoretical and explorative steps. To him we express our gratitude and endless affection. We also thank Mariachiara Giorda for providing helpful comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

international migrations, we suggest reading the apparently paradoxical situation in the light of the following broad hypothesis: namely, the widely recognized status of Rome as a 'religious city,' due to its extensive Catholic legacy, which promotes ongoing religious 'appropriation' of the urban space by various groups. This appropriation occurs when the two levels (hyper-local and global) overlap on the terrain where Catholicism is historically rooted in Rome (the patron saints of the districts vs. St. Peter).

On a more theoretical level, this hypothesis elaborates on the contradiction between the *interpretation* and *use* of a given message (Eco 1990) and the bi-dimensionality of cultural identity, namely external categorization and internal identification processes (Jenkins 1994). Rome as a national brand carries the general meaning of *the Catholic City*. The city brand conveyed by its banal Catholicism is spread via the standard channels of the imaginary, namely mediascapes and tourism. Yet once this robust identification – Rome is the centre of Catholic Christendom – is liberated and disseminated via worldwide communication systems (from the big media of TV broadcasts to the small media of tourists chatting to their social circles via Instagram), it is set free from authoritative interpretations to be used and given different meanings by casual or intentional audiences. Different categorizations may prevail – like the notion that Rome is a place where religion is a shared jargon for talking about reality. Instead of being interpreted as a unique expression of its local identity, Catholicism can be seen as just a token of its type, i.e. religion, which attracts religious difference as a potential stage of expression.

Of course, the intensity with which the city attracts difference does not totally correspond to that difference's capability, or will, to manifest itself. The ways that imported difference expresses itself, becomes visible or is even aware of its public role depend on a set of complex variables. The specific localization of difference may play a central role in rendering it visible: some forms of difference may publicly thrive in

a bountiful environment, while others practically suffocate in isolation. Similarly, cultural traditions and genealogies are also relevant, since some are used to shy away from visibility while others require a stage for their public performances. Another issue is institutional acceptability, according to which differences can be perceived or described as further from or closer to the extant cultural and religious environment.

There is no contradiction, in our view, between the attractiveness of Rome to difference and the hurdles that this difference often encounters when attempting to display itself, since they are quite separate processes. One is a potential ecological pull, the other a strategic path of concrete adaptation. To expand on the same metaphor, different species may be attracted to the same area, yet they adopt utterly different strategies of visibility, and, likewise, the area itself habitually expresses its own preferences and policies of relative acceptance.

Within this broader theory of attraction and acceptance, we approach our topic by recalling that the study of the urban space needs to be handled with new narratives on the relationships between religion and modernity, above and beyond the strict idea of secularization. In this article, the *postsecular* is seen as a notion that can frame religious diversity in contemporary cities and be used to examine the case of Rome as an increasingly pluralized city. We go on to present the Eternal City as a *sui generis* case where the Italian scenario can shed light on the macro-global stage of religious non-Catholic places. A heterogeneous series of meaningful and large-scale projects – from the 'old' synagogue to the Mormon temple currently under construction – are traced and finally reconnected, in the two concluding paragraphs, with a broader understanding of Rome as a 'religious global city': a city in which non-Catholic groups, far from just being pressured to conform by the Catholic model and passively adapting to it, perform their identities not only by silently insinuating them into the narrow alleys of Rome's districts but also by playing them aloud on a brightly lit global

stage. The growing relevance of religious diversity in the space of Rome potentially exposes the city to the triggering of postsecular social practices, although cultural, political and juridical constraints still seem to limit their transformative potential.

### **Framing religious diversity in the urban space**

In the new century *the city* once again becomes 'a lens for social theory' (Sassen 2010), as it was conceptualized for urban sociologists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; the conjuncture between *space* and *religion* finds a privileged context for analysis here (Harvieu-Léger 2002, Knott 2005, Knott and Vasquez 2014). Seen from this angle, urban dimension offers a more appropriate observatory than the nation-state level for capturing and showing the space, role and changes in religion in contemporary societies (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011, Becci, Burckhardt and Casanova 2013).

What contemporary cities mainly reveal, as many scholars in recent decades have helped clarify, is an increase in *religious diversity* (Beckford 2014).

International migration and globalization, which firstly provoke the de-territorialization of religious traditions, end up implying processes of re-territorialization, by which communities appropriate new urban spaces without giving up their own religious beliefs and customs. By dint of these processes, which accompany changes specific to the religiosity of 'autochthonous' populations, 'old' and 'new' religious presences populate, in ways that are both traditional and innovative, usual and unusual spaces dislocated between the *centre* and *periphery* of our metropolises, 'mega-cities' or even small towns. Concerning the 'emplacement' (Smith 1987) of religion in urban spaces, we may add that religious diversity seems to travel in two main directions. The first is the pluralization of traditional places of worship for different religions: cathedrals, churches, synagogues and mosques, which, depending on the particular case, comply to a greater or lesser extent with the canons of the respective traditions, attract smaller or larger

communities, respond to a greater or lesser extent to their religious needs, are socially/economically connected to the surrounding area to a greater or lesser extent, and so on. The second direction is a pluralization and innovation of the ways in which the *sacred place*<sup>1</sup> is conceived and used: parallel to the establishment of canonical places of worship for different traditions, a series of alternative, more flexible and even hybrid places are increasingly being used as prayer rooms (Gilliat-Ray 2005) or multi-faith places (Crompton 2013, de Velasco 2014)<sup>2</sup> located in social spaces (parks, squares, shopping malls, etc.) and institutions (prisons, hospitals, university campuses, etc.); or even part-time sanctuaries, virtual prayer rooms in cyberspace, and so on. Religious places of this kind not only express the trend of *individualizing* and *spiritualizing* beliefs and praxis, as some scholars have pointed out (Gilliat Ray 2005, Heelas and Woodhead 2005, Becci, Burchard and Giorda 2016), but also a religious 'punctuating' of social spaces by non-conventional sacred places, which are additional to, or sometimes a substitute for, traditional ones.

Such pluralization of 'spatialized' forms of religion is also reflected in the differentiated set of strategies through which religious groups relate to the urban space. This means that the city is not merely an arena traversed by struggles among communities for the distribution of the same resources. Besides strategies of appropriation, exclusion and resistance to such domination (Chidester and Linenthal 1995), we may find diverse communities taking specific paths and following different approaches across the various city zones: i.e. the mostly dominant Christian traditions negotiate spatial regimes through *place-keeping* strategies; diaspora and migrant religions adopt *place-making* strategies, while

<sup>1</sup> We agree with the broad distinction between the terms *space* and *place* that identifies the first as a basically abstract concept and the second as more specific 'practice' space, in which the sacred is localized (Giorda and Hejazi 2013).

<sup>2</sup> See the research project 'Multi-faith Spaces – Symptoms and Agents of Religious and Social Change' - 'Religion and Society' Program, 2007-2012.

new religious movements and practitioners of contemporary spirituality are *place-seekers* (Becci, Burchard and Giorda 2016).

Taken as a whole, these tendencies may legitimize the use of the concept 'religious *super-diversity*' (Vertovec 2007), which accurately highlights the multisided spatial practices of both 'old' and 'new' religions in urban life (Becci, Burchard and Giorda 2016).

We could, however, add a further consideration. Taken as a whole, all these tendencies recount a relationship between religion and modern society which can hardly be interpreted in terms of mere secularization. To put it another way, the study of religion through the observation of contemporary pluralized cities absolutely needs to be approached through the prism of the current reframing of religion in late modernity, moving away from the theories that foresaw the automatic secularization of urbanization in modern life. We see the notion of postsecular as the most fruitful narrative that has emerged as an alternative to the failures of classical theories of secularization to address the renewed role of religion in the contemporary urban and public realm (Casanova 1994, Habermas 2006, Molendijk, Beaumont and Jedan 2010, Rosati and Stoekle 2012). We will argue briefly that *if* city is the space in which religions and the sacred appear in previously unforeseen places and ways, and *if* city is therefore the space in which the borders between the religious and the secular are constantly being redefined, *then* the postsecular probably offers a useful frame.

Some scholars are skeptical about the use of the postsecular for studying the urban space (Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr and Middell 2015, Giorda 2015) and about framing religions within institutional settings (Beckford 2010, 2012). What is apparently not often clear in these criticisms is that the concept does not – or should not rigorously – mean an overcoming of secularization – or *multiple secularizations* (Burchardt, Wohlrab-Sahr and Middell 2015) – or even a sort of re-sacralization of the public sphere. A recent attempt to deconstruct the postsecular into its

main 'sociological conditions' (Rosati and Stoekle 2012, Rosati 2015) suggests that the following features should be present in society: 1. The role and 'voice' of religions – especially those that Jakelić called *collectivistic religions* (2010) – in social and public life not just as a residual but as a persistent and mutating element; 2. In parallel, the sacred that inhabits our time not only as an immanent, but also a transcendent and heteronomous force; 3. An overcoming of religious monopolies and a plurality of individual and collective religious beliefs and practices; 4. The secular and the religious without rigidly separated borders: constant, reciprocally induced adjustments and transformations as a result of their presence in and use of a common space (urban, political, institutional, virtual, etc.). Arising from the aforementioned factors, another key feature of a postsecular society is: 5. Secular and religious beliefs and practices interacting in a way that can sometimes move and reshape the dividing lines between them, which also gives rise to the possibility of new configurations – *interpenetrations*, in Góle's terms (2005) – of both secular and religious viewpoints and practices (see Day, Vincett and Cotter 2013). It is assumed that in situations of co-presence, such dialectic relationships are fostered by *reflexivity*, as a modern competence attributable not only to secular (Habermas 2006) but also religious forms of life (Seligman 2004). Finally, Rosati (2015) also suggests that only in the presence of these five sociological conditions does the proper normative statement of the postsecular – pluralism as an orientation towards mutual exchange or, in Habermas's well-known expression (2006), *complementary learning* – make sense. Postsecular means a change in content of a society's central value system: from a secular self-understanding, in which the secular and the religious are perceived as two antagonistic camps, to a postsecular one, in which they are part of the same field.

The features of the postsecular are mostly, but not solely, characteristic of late capitalist cities in the West. However, we refer to them as something 'in the making' and highly dependent on

context: individual cases may display a number of features, whose combined effect may trigger processes of complementary learning, or these features may be absent or ineffective. The usefulness of the notion of postsecular in social research is precisely the possibility of detecting through this lens elements and dynamics in urban life that might well be hidden to a differently oriented view (Baker and Beaumont 2011).

In this contribution we limit the analysis to a preliminary interpretation of the situation in Rome, where some of the listed features of the postsecular are displayed. In particular, the visibility of different religious groups, demands, places and strategies of territorialization, which is growing in Italian public and social spheres, is particularly expressed in Rome. As we argue in the following paragraphs, diversity in this city is represented both at hyper-local level and at a macroscopically large-scale one. As an (apparent) paradox, we emphasize that in Rome pluralization does not exist *despite* but *as a result of* the mainly Catholic legacy and the moulding effect of this specific religion on the city. Such super-diversity signals a condition that ideally enriches the city ecologies that are characterized by hybridization, change and mutual learning characteristic of a postsecular urban space. At the same time, the transformative potential deriving from 'postsecular interactions and practices' – in a word, the creation of potentially conflictual but also cooperative relationships between different religious and secular actors and groups – is constrained by a broader scenario still hesitant, from a cultural and juridical and political point of view, to fully embrace pluralism. As we stress in the next paragraph, this can be considered one of the main reasons for the difficult emergence of religious places and practices at the very local level in Rome.

In this sense, a further, more detailed stage of our research work that will be carried out in upcoming months, will require focusing on specific areas in Rome and expanding on the conditions under which conflict and struggles arise – e.g., in relation to building permits, public dis-

plays of religious symbols and rituals (Oosterbaan 2014) – or rather the possibilities for dialectic relationships and complementary learning that arise during the processes of territorialization of religions.

### **The Changing Scenario in Italy**

Although Italy is still perceived to be mainly and persistently 'Catholic,' despite secularization (Garelli 2011, Marzano 2012), the religious composition of the population has clearly been changing over the past few decades, as is also the case in other European countries. This is a result of different drivers: on the one hand, the diversification in Christian affiliations of Italians (primarily, the huge increase in Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostal congregations) and the growth of individual forms of spirituality; on the other hand, it is the outcome of the growing presence of 'other religions.' Italy's huge involvement in international migrations has led to the presence of people from almost 190 countries around the world: a 'diversity within a diversity', consisting of Muslims from different traditions; different Orthodox groups (Romanians, Ukrainians, Serbians, Moldovans, Greeks, and Russians), with their specific traditions; Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Tamils from India; different versions of Pentecostals (Africans, Latin-Americans and Chinese) and so on (Pace 2014: 94). In broad terms and in the absence of specific data which are still not systematically collected in our country, an estimated 7.6% of people living in Italy belong to religions other than Roman Catholicism, many of which practice Islam, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and a robust Protestantism (Pentecostalism and Baptism) from Asia and Africa (Pace 2013 and 2014).

Similarly, the socio-religious geography of Italy and the religious 'punctuating' of social spaces in our cities are also changing, making diversity more and more visible. However, some of this diversity still seems to be hidden from the eyes of Italians. Furthermore, we gauge a sort of 'mutual invisibility,' a relative fragmentation (each segment of religious difference knows very

little about the others) and a lack of purposeful public discourse that could bring the issue to the fore. Religious super-diversity is thus a growing and permeating phenomenon with a side still-hidden: the specific case study we will be discussing clearly exemplifies the theoretical connections between invisibility and pervasiveness. As we anticipated, the hidden side of religious super-diversity is probably related to cultural and political-institutional unpreparedness regarding recognition of pluralism. This is more than evident in the complex and ambiguous set of regulations on places of worship and the absence of an overall law of religious freedom and even specific agreements between the State and many religious communities, first and foremost of which, certainly in terms of size, are the Islamic organizations.

However, social and public awareness is only recently starting to grow with the appearance of a series of religious and social sciences studies that map the presence of places of worship across the national territory and in a number of local areas (Allievi 2010, Pace 2013, Angelucci, Bombardieri *et al.* 2014, Giorda 2015). These studies permit a gradual shift from vague estimates to a more accurate, although still far from complete, cartography.

According to the most detailed study carried out on a national level (Pace 2013), the places of worship related to the 'new presences' in Italy are mainly Islamic, Orthodox, African neo-Pentecostal and Buddhist. But 36 Sikh temples (*Gurudwara*) have also been counted. The spatial situations of these places vary to a large degree. Islamic places of worship – over 600 scattered across the national territory, mostly in urban areas in the North where the economy has attracted immigrants from Muslim-majority countries – are mostly *musallayat* organized in very precarious and inappropriate spaces. Conversely, the emplacement of Orthodox churches from 2000 onwards, appears much more stable, partly as a result of Roman-Catholic bishops facilitating the use of small formerly Catholic churches or chapels, often located in urban peripheries.

Of particular relevance is the distribution of the different denominations of Pentecostal churches, largely dominated by Ghanaian and Nigerian Pentecostals and mainly concentrated in southern Italy. Finally, Sikh organizations are undergoing a gradual process of institutionalization involving apparently smooth negotiations with local authorities leading to the appropriation of spaces such as former industrial sheds for worship.

This multitude of different religious and differently sacralized places throughout the national territory is rapidly changing and extremely difficult to map for social research (Pace 2013:11).

### The 'Eternal City' as a *sui generis* case

Against the backdrop of the scenario just discussed, we argue that Rome constitutes a *sui generis* case. In the world capital of Catholicism, in a country where the political and religious spheres have always overlapped to a certain extent, Rome has rapidly become religiously superdiverse at a microscopic, but also macroscopic level.

It is certainly true for Rome, as for other European and Italian urban areas, that the process of re-territorialization of religions, intended as a necessary consequence of the de-territorialization caused by globalization and international migrations, has resolved itself into a dislocation of different communities at a hyper-local scale. Rome is near the top of the list of cities most concerned by migrations, both in terms of stable communities and people in transit, and it is clearly an excellent social laboratory, in which not only cultural but also urban-spatial features are constantly being redefined. As a number of studies and ethnographies covering the city as a whole and certain districts in particular have shown in the past few years (Macioti 2013)<sup>3</sup>, the city and

<sup>3</sup> Other precious sources of data on religious diversity and places in Rome include various yearly reports, *Immigrati a Roma e Provincia. Luoghi di incontro e di preghiera*, edited by the 'Caritas Diocesana di Roma' and 'Migrantes Roma e Lazio' associations; the publication from the *Osservatorio Romano sulle Migrazioni* by the IDOS research centre, and the *Luoghi comuni*,

its province are dotted with a multitude of small religious places. These places may be Catholic, Islamic, Orthodox, Protestant or Buddhist, and are often side by side and embedded within highly multicultural zones. The specific history of urban development – i.e., the chaotic expansion of the city limits with no regulations other than those imposed by housing needs and economic exploitation of land (Cellamare 2014) – has not yet allowed for the insurgence of spatial sectarianism or other clear-cut territorial divisions. Even though in recent years a slow process of ethnic territorialization has gained relative momentum, so far this only shows as an extremely fragmented patchwork on the map and in no way matches the level of complexity and refinement of the now highly specialized ethnic division of labour. As a consequence, religious difference is scattered across the map without any apparent pattern and we are forced to include this evident lack of design in our representation of the situation that focuses on small case studies.

As we mentioned, within the tightness of the urban structure at this hyper-local level, the invisibility of non-Catholic religious places is certainly related, as it is for the country as a whole, to the legal and political governance of religious diversity and the constraints imposed on religious communities in terms of manifesting their presence through architectures that are ‘coherent’ with their traditions and conceptions of the sacred place (Pace 2013: 245).

However, Rome’s original role also involves representing religious diversity on a macroscopically large scale. With its two ‘record places of worship’ – the largest mosque in the West and the largest Buddhist temple in Europe – and a number of other relevant old and new religious establishments, Rome constitutes a sort of ‘brightly lit religious stage’ on which different traditions and organizations play their institutionalized and international role.

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*luoghi in comune* report documenting the research project carried out by the ‘Centro Astalli’ association in 2015.

### **From the Synagogue to the Mormon Temple: Old and New Macro-Religious Places in Rome**

It is a little-known fact that Rome hosts a third Jewish tradition alongside the much better known Ashkenazic and Sephardic traditions, namely the Roman tradition, which has its own rites and local variants. The very existence of this tradition shows the long historical continuity of the Jewish presence in Rome – there is even a saying to the effect that if you are looking for Romans who can trace their ancestry back seven generations, you’ll find them in the ghetto. Exponential urban growth<sup>4</sup> has been multiplying non-Roman strands of the city since the 1870s. This demographic explosion has made Roman-ness an extremely scarce resource, bringing about the moral irony that – for historical, ideological and political reasons barely discernible in the original meaning of the word ‘ghetto’ – it is best preserved by a racialized religious minority. The last preserve of genuine local identity, Roman Jews embody the paradox of representing Otherness in the name of Self: while Rome stereotypically embodies a uniform and potentially universal (‘Catholic’) Christianity, its cultural identity and specificity seem to be preserved at its best by a population that, from the 15th century if not before, was systematically targeted as a moral culprit and a literal scapegoat.

Jews in Rome can boast a 2000-year-old presence (Cappelletti 2006) and that alone grants the city a sort of splendour by proxy and, conversely, a very specific sense of locality to Roman Jews, steeped, willingly or not, in the archaeological grandeur of Rome. In a postsecular exercise of ‘cultural intimacy’ (Herzfeld 1997) their existence can be publicly derided and disdained (anti-Semitism is still very much alive in Rome) and simultaneously intimately recognised and praised as the best evidence of true local identity. While the rest of the city seems to be falling apart under the pressure of global economic forces and gentrification (Herzfeld 2009), the Jewish ‘ghetto’ –

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<sup>4</sup> A population of 200,000 at the time of Italian unification (1871) had already increased to one million sixty years later, which almost doubled by 1961.

although entirely demolished at the time of the Italian emancipation (Scott Lerner 2002) – still represents a bastion of Roman-ness. This fact attests the existence and relevance of a non-Catholic foundation of Roman identity.

In other cases, the intertwining of religious and civic identity tended to be imposed on the Catholic Church by the religious minority rather than the other way round, expressing once again the strong attractiveness of the Catholic mainstream, which, however, lacks the power to homogenise. Until 1870, when Rome was first ruled by a religious authority, reformed Christian churches were not allowed to officiate in specialised religious buildings (i.e. ‘churches’ and ‘temples’) within the Aurelian walls. This restriction was subsequently extended to the city limits and then to the border with the Ager Romanus wilderness. Once papal Rome fell into the hands of the Italian Army and became Italian, the new constitution allowed freedom of worship on national territory, including Rome. Less than two weeks after this was sanctioned, Episcopalians in Rome resolved to ask for funds to build a church ‘within the walls’<sup>5</sup>. Two years later, they were able to purchase land on the newly planned, then incomplete, via Nazionale. In November 1872, the ground was broken for the foundations of the new church, to be dedicated to Saint Paul, ‘Apostle of the Gentiles.’ Since Rome already had a basilica called San Paolo outside the walls, the new church was spontaneously, yet symbolically no less relevant and confrontational, named St. Paul’s Within the Walls. St. Peter and St. Paul, who had always represented two rather distant conceptions of Christianity that eventually came to epitomise Catholic and Protestant views respectively, were now sharing the same place, the city of Rome. The pattern seems clear: the presence and public manifestation of religious diversity is triggered by the image of compact homogeneity the city is keen to present to the unaware visitor. Far from levelling out alternate religious beliefs and practises, a strong unified political centrality

organised around a single belief attracts diversity as a field of potential religious wealth.

The process we are attempting to highlight has a long history and can be traced back to at least the Middle Ages. However, it became visible in all its dimensions in the early 1980s with the arrival of non-Judeo-Christian and non-European cultural traditions of global migrations from the post-colonial world.

The biggest mosque in Western Europe is a prominent sign of this social transformation in Rome. It is located in the northern sector of the city, and its construction exposes the conjunction of economic, political and entirely symbolic drivers of social life.

In the early 1970s, Italy was still a country of emigrants (positive net migration was reached in the mid-1970s) and there were few Muslims in Rome or Italy as a whole, with the exception of the staff in the embassies and consulates of Muslim countries and a few scattered historical communities in Sicily. One cannot help but wonder exactly why “the Islamic Cultural Centre and the ambassadors of all the Muslim countries assigned to Italy and the Vatican” (Salama 2001: 3) informally requested the Italian President to give them a place on which to build a mosque in Rome. Nor is it self-evident from purely demographic data why the then King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, in the same period, expressed his desire to make a generous contribution towards the building of a new place for Muslims to pray in Rome. Understanding how this external desire of a tiny presence led to the construction of the huge Roman Mosque and Islamic Centre is a complex matter and involves untangling a particularly Roman strand of local political life.

The growing economic and political relevance of Muslim countries from the 1970s onwards brought about a newly constructed representation of Islam as a sign of difference from ‘the West’. The Muslim faith was seeking renewed visibility, and ended up becoming the pivotal element of a multiplied, multifarious notion of modernity where religion acquired an utterly different meaning from that of standard modernity

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stpaulsrome.it/visit-us/history/> (Accessed 2 March 2016).



theories (Hefner 1998). While this global flow of Islamic revival was taking shape across the world, Rome was attempting a new approach to religion in the public sphere, via the transformation of local politics.

In 1975 the famous art historian Carlo Giulio Argan was elected to the city council in the lists of the Communist Party and appointed Mayor of Rome. This was a significant transformation for a city where the secular authorities had always paid formal respect to the Vatican with a long list of Christian Democrat mayors since 1946. Shortly after the new start heralded by his appointment, Argan made the 'post-secular move' of fostering a brand new form of dialogue with religion. Instead of taking the modern layman's approach of disregarding the role of Catholic power as a naturally declining relic from the past that was yielding to the secular, Argan opened the door to dialogue with religious difference, donating 30,000 m<sup>2</sup> of land to the Muslims in Rome for building a mosque. An international contest was announced for the following year and the construction project was launched. Notwithstanding major difficulties, delays and the opposition of Italian residents in Rome, the premises were inaugurated in 1995 and now house an important library of Islamic books, a conference hall and a stunning mosque that opens its doors to a truly international Muslim community for meetings and prayers every Friday.

The point we are seeking to make here is quite simple but nevertheless central to any theory of religious diversity: Rome would not host the biggest mosque in Western Europe were it not for the moral and spiritual dimensions of St. Peter's Square. Nor would it have St. Paul's *within* the Walls without St. Paul's *outside*, and the city's strong identity and cultural ethos would be less clear without the Jewish bastion of Roman purity, however paradoxical that might seem. A pure image of uniform belonging calls for religious diversity, and once globalization sets in motion religions as ideoscapes (Appadurai 1996), i.e., ideological frameworks necessary to the

cultural maintenance of ethnoscaapes, the push and pull of migration creates the conditions for a highly likely confrontation with religious diversity. 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do' should be read differently from its usual interpretation. The saying does not necessarily imply social pressure to conform or a passive adaptation to the law of the land. Rather, it could be read as 'when confronted with a local context, learn local forms of communication and adapt to them.' Since Rome is commonly seen as a religious centre, once diversity enters, it starts communicating *sub specie religionis*, namely expressing itself according to a religious language, whatever that may be. Conversely, for those seeking to emphasize their religious specificity, there could be no better stage than Rome, where every religious detail is highlighted by the *genius loci*. There is positive feedback here on two levels: Rome tends to ask difference for a translation into a religious jargon in order to make this difference understandable to the local inflection; and the city attracts religious difference like a magnet in its quest for visibility and recognition. We argue that this speaks volumes about why there are other 'record-breaking' religious premises in Rome, such as the Buddhist Temple, or the Mormon Temple currently under construction.

The first, *Hua Yi Si*, run by the eponymous association in collaboration with the 'Unione Buddhista Italiana' (UBI), is the biggest Chinese Zen Temple in Europe and opened a year after an agreement was signed in 2013 between the UBI and the Italian State. It was built with funds donated by the Chinese population in Italy and Taiwan. It is located in the eastern suburbs of the city, in the Chinese community's wholesale business district, which moved to the area in 2000. The pagoda-style temple stands out among the warehouses and containers. Initially designed as a branch of another smaller temple in the Esquilino district, *Hua Yi Si* has become more important due to its size and value as perceived by the community. It particularly represents immi-

grants' communities – its inauguration in Rome was attended by Chinese communities from cities such as Naples, Pisa, Brescia – while its bonds with Italian Buddhist communities are quite weak (Scialdone 2013).

If we now consider the Mormon Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, we again witness an extraordinary process of emplacement by a non-Catholic religious group in a mainly Catholic city. The Temple, which will be completed in late 2017 (although no official opening dates have been announced), will be the twelfth temple of its kind in Europe and the first in Italy as a further step in the international expansion of one of the most opulent religious organisations in the world. According to the presentation given by the community, the temple is a grandiose religious, cultural and architectural project, designed to measure 'up to' the Eternal City. The vast construction site stands on an elevated 15-acre site in northeast Rome, and will become a magnificent temple with a centerpiece consisting of a complex of buildings with a meeting house, a visitor center with exhibitions about the Mormons, a family history library providing facilities and equipment for genealogical research<sup>6</sup>, and an accommodation centre. For the Mormons, as for the Buddhists, the process of seeking a concordat with the Italian State, which occurred in parallel with the rapid growth of the Mormon Church in Italy (around 30,000 members, with over 2,000 in Rome alone)<sup>7</sup>, was relatively quick and was finalized by 2012. The relative rapidity of this legal recognition, compared to other religious groups that have been present for much longer in Italy, indicates the remarkable efficiency of this community, supported by its close bonds with the United States, a cultural context which was (is) – if not fully hostile – rife with prejudice toward the Mormons (Naso 2013).

<sup>6</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints practices 'Baptism for the Dead' which requires genealogical research for the 'salvation of ancestors' souls'.

<sup>7</sup> See the presences counted by the CESNUR research group ([www.cesnur.com](http://www.cesnur.com)).

The five examples we have discussed so far, although they are different, nonetheless share a common generative matrix, namely the relation between urban space, religious diversity and identity processes. Were there a rule, it would probably read: no matter what your historical or geographical distance from Rome, once you settle in Rome you should establish your own architectural expression of your religious specificity. When in Rome, build as the Romans do; in other words, use the language of public building design to display your specific identity. In this way, the emancipated Jews accordingly accepted the total destruction of the ghetto, which was replaced with a grandiose synagogue with unusual 'Oriental' décor in one of the city's districts; the Episcopalians wanted to have their non-Catholic church as close as possible to the city center; the Muslims created a place far too big for their numbers; the Chinese de-ethnicized and re-spiritualized their presence in Rome, and the Mormons are still attempting to avoid local prejudice by erecting their magnificent temple.

There are, of course, differences among these stances and they most likely attest the inner heterogeneity of spatial strategies within the analytical category of *place making* (Becci, Burchard and Giorda 2016). The Jews and the Chinese present a statement of their religious identity against the background of what could otherwise be perceived as an ethnic or even a racial character. The Muslims and the Mormons wield their grandiloquent architectures as guarantors of their religious relevance, while the Episcopalians are more interested in promoting a defiant image of non-submissive Christians. They all seem to have "expressed their inner identity" by embedding it in the ethos of their places: The Jews have accepted modernity, the Episcopalians have once again denied Papal authority, the Muslims have humbly raised their heads, the Chinese have superseded materialism and the Mormons continue wearing their usual ties and badges.

Difference (old and new, social or racial, consolidated or fragile) in Rome expresses itself in a religious form through the identification of spe-

cific places that entail dialogue or confrontation with 'traditional' (namely, Catholic) places of religiosity.

### **Rome and Diversity: The Local and the Global**

We have seen how the homogenous image of Rome attracts self-aware religious diversity like a brightly lit stage, inciting those who come for other reasons to express themselves in a religious jargon. As we approach the conclusion, we need to explain how Catholicism has worked in a double sense, both as a producer of locality and as a public projector of its Roman image on the transnational stage, in order to understand how it intensifies both the local and the global dimensions of religious diversity.

In the last fifty years, as a participant in the mediatization of social life, Rome has emphatically offered itself as a perfect representative of 'urban religiosity,' and a 'religious brand' to the world (Usunier and Stolz 2014). At the same time, locals and newcomers alike must translate their cultural diversity into a religious discourse, thus transforming foreigners into residents at the very local level of literally parochial identity. In a nutshell, while a pious Muslim (or Orthodox Christian, or Buddhist, or other) comes to Rome because s/he recognizes the Eternal City as a successful brand of global religiosity, s/he is of course aware of that quality before coming, and s/he will retain this idea, which will become heightened in his/her further movements; a non-pious Muslim (or other) may re-discover the faith of his/her ancestors when confronted with the intrusive religious discourse that permeates Rome at a very local dimension, and relate that reborn religious identity to ongoing local practices.

From a socio-anthropological point of view, we note first of all the apparently flamboyant diversity of popular Catholicism practiced by ordinary Italians, in which Rome creates various and well delimited senses of locality and contributes to the emergence of an overall urban dimension in the form of a patchwork of popular pieties. Together they then flow into a 'subter-

anean river' of diffuse (Cipriani 1988) or implicit (Nesti 1994) religiosity, while keeping their specificity and respective distance. Even if they do not attend church, locals tend to participate in parish activities like processions and patron saints' festivals and, more importantly, they participate in 'their own' patron saint's festivals, and not others. This is related to the fragmentation of the urban fabric, which conjures up the image of many pockets of Roman-ness half-heartedly fighting one another. Like all village processions in the Catholic world, each parish procession winds its way around its borders and delimits the participants' sense of belonging. In the summer in particular (although there are also processions in winter), different parts of the city, from the center to the periphery, are decorated for the 'Feast of the Saint.' A few roads are closed to traffic and stands are installed for the fair, while the committee prepares the inevitable lottery and lucky dip, enlists the brass band to lead the procession and organizes the fireworks. From *Madonna dei Monti* to the *Immacolata* of San Lorenzo, to the lesser-known parishes outside the walls, there are dozens of processions in Rome, all performing their role of reinforcing the territorial boundaries of the parish – as the notion of 'parochial package' indicates (Nelson and Gorsky 2014). The pervasive presence of small urban shrines, tiny chapels and kiosks fortifies this foundational role of religion at a local level, but in Rome it takes a particular twist with the inclusion of a pilgrimage. While processions confirm the participants' territorial ownership, pilgrimages place the pilgrims outside their known world and challenge them to reach to the sacred place by crossing the unknown. In this respect, pilgrimage is structurally linked to tourism (Badone and Roseman 2004) and migration because, out of necessity, it offers the opportunity of inclusion to the stranger. The pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Divino Amore (Divine Love) is a good example of the way pilgrimages can be incorporated into the city structure as well as generate a sense of locality. The story of this pilgrimage recounts that, in 1740, a traveler got lost on his way to St. Peter's

Church in Rome and was attacked by a pack of stray dogs in the wilderness. In great distress, he saw an icon of the Holy Virgin and cried out for help to the Mother of God. The dogs calmed down and the man was rescued by some shepherds who gave him directions to Rome. The story of the miracle quickly spread, and a sanctuary was built on the site of the icon, becoming a devotional pilgrimage destination. During the Second World War the Pope consecrated the city of Rome to the Virgin of the Sanctuary of Divine Love as protection against the bombardments (Canta 2004: 198). Once the war was over, the Romans paid their debt to the Virgin and began building a new sanctuary, which was inaugurated by John Paul II in 1999.

The key point we want to make is this: what was originally a pilgrimage that brought Romans 'fuori porta' (outside the walls), became, with urban expansion, a movement of and within the city itself, transforming the pilgrimage into a meta-procession that established the overarching city limits. Instead of setting Romans in motion, the Divino Amore pilgrimage *produced* Roman citizenship, expanding the geographical and social dimensions of belonging. What used to be a journey to the sacred for Roman popular piety and the lower classes, steadily turned into a rite of passage towards a fully-fledged Roman identity for the multitudes of immigrants from central and southern Italy that were striving to find their place in the metropolis in the second half of the 20th century. Just as Romans went to Divino Amore (when it still was a pilgrimage crossing the unknown to the sacred), immigrants from southern Italy – who came from villages where the sense of participating in the patron saint's procession was strong – became Romans by participating in the Divino Amore meta-procession. This discourse of belonging through a local rhetoric of piety has been employed by foreigners as well, as is shown by the many foreigners from Catholic, Christian Orthodox and even Muslim backgrounds who go to Divino Amore (Canta 2004: 123-134). Visual evidence of this can be seen in the profusion of votive offerings

(*ex-voto*), notes jotted in many scripts and languages and left by non-Roman, non-Italian citizens on the sanctuary walls, as well as around the city. *Ex-voto* are very important in popular Catholicism because they connect people to a saint and to a specific place through the saint's image. There are many small shrines in Rome (at least 23, according to our investigation) with replicas of the Divino Amore. These shrines are the object of an intense movement of people from all over the world that engenders a sense of locality, i.e., it enables those who participate in this aspect of popular piety to feel they 'own' the city.

However, this is only half the story. While the Catholic Church has become a source of localization by offering a discourse of piety in which religious difference has been able to carve up its role and space in the city, it has also been able to exploit its universal role to propose a truly global dimension of its image by accepting and taking its stereotypical image as the heart of Christendom seriously. The principal advocate of this globalized approach to the Catholic religion was John Paul II, the Polish Pope who revolutionized the relationship between Catholicism and the media (Mazza 2006). He was fully aware that the media not only represented social reality but also worked to create it (Fazio 1997), and from the outset of his papacy, he travelled the world, establishing a global Pope-scape that made him one of the most influential political leaders of the 20th century by intersecting the mythical and mystical dimensions of the papacy (Melady 1999). He organized media events like the World Youth Days, which have had a lasting effect on the overall communication system of Catholicism and other religions. For our purposes, suffice to say that his papacy signaled the entry of Catholicism into the global mediascape, a growing intersection of images and words that circulate across the globe and arrive in specific territories to be read according to local knowledge. This is the opposite movement to the one described in the Divino Amore procession, namely an explosion of local identity onto the

global scene. The 'Roman means of religious production' became morally available to the rest of the world, which has reacted by refracting the model into its multifarious local forms. Once again, though, diversity takes off and is enhanced by the compactness of the model to which it responds.

### **Conclusion: Rome as a Religious Global City**

We maintain that super-diversity is developing on a global scale by means of the same two-fold path (hyper-local and global) that we have described for the Catholic tradition in the urban space of Rome. More generally, the more a place has a recognizable religious dimension, the more it may become a producer, a place of exchange and consumer of religious diversity. The widely recognized status of Rome as a 'religious city' due to its historical conjunction with the Catholic Church is precisely what appears to contribute to the ongoing and growing macro-appropriation of the urban space by diverse religious groups.

We have striven to provide evidence that this paradox is only apparent. A handy way to clarify the point one last time is by using the theory of the *global city* formulated in the 1980s. According to this theoretical perspective on the economic process of globalization in an urban context, the headquarters of big transnational corporations began to concentrate in post-industrial cities such as London, New York, San Francisco and Tokyo at a time when the availability of basic service infrastructures for banking, accounting and legal support transformed these cities into global attractors (Cohen 1981, Friedmann and Wolf 1982, Sassen 1991). Whatever their business, if firms wanted to 'go global,' they had to rely on complex service networks, only available and fully efficient in very few 'global cities.' This made those spaces even more 'global' in a snowball effect where an initial nucleus of services catered to the needs of the precursors while simultaneously attracting new competitors. Conversely, corporate groups historically present in the global cities tended to adapt to the new economic environment by converting their core

business into the global form for which the particular city had developed a specific expertise. In our hypothesis, the increase in religious diversity in Rome works on a similar double development path. The strong social representation of Rome as a religiously marked area attracts assorted self-aware religious presences at the same time as pushing other forms of diversity to express themselves in a religious configuration: attracted religious diversity plus diversity uttered in a religious inflection equals religious super-diversity.

Looking back at what we have collected in the form of stories and narratives of the places of worship we have discussed, there seems to be a persistent coherence between these – albeit global – spatial projects with the inner grammars of their specific religious traditions and cultures. As far as developing research allows us to generalize, we would not refer to this as a standardization, or in Roy's terms 'formatting' (Roy 2010: 187-91), effect of globalization on religions, if the notion entails a disentanglement of religions from their local frameworks to circulate more freely worldwide and intersect with other 'floating cultural markers'. Nor does it seem possible to claim that the Catholic model has been working as a pressurizing element, inducing 'other religions' to somehow reproduce this model, e.g. in the design of architectures, spatial organization of the sacred or chaplaincy services and so on. However, in cases when this pressure is applied – we guess more at the hyper-local than the macroscopic level – it is more likely the lack of resources and unequal distribution of power that force the 'less equipped' into certain social, cultural and spatial constraints.

Our reconstruction also moves away from conservative theses that claim the Christian-Catholic tradition and *civitas* are the 'core' of religiosity, the guardian of sacredness *per se* and the necessary controller of the 'traffic' of pluralism (Pabst and Milbank 2012). Instead of being a center around which religious diversity revolves for good and for bad, Catholicism in Rome seems to work more as a glittering stage, enticing old players that are still seeking fame and fortune and

even attracting those who had never thought of treading the boards before.

The global city effect does not resolve itself into absorbing diversity into a monolithic model. On the contrary, only a few cities have developed into distinct global cities and have allowed, if not facilitated, a tremendous growth of difference within their confines. We should not forget that both the global city standard theory (Sassen 1991) and the super-diversity theory (Vertovec 2007) were elaborated with a central model based on a very restricted set of cities, one or two in particular, namely London and New York. Keeping this paradigm in mind, we are now able to accept once and for all that economic globalization does not always mean cultural homogenization, and quite often, it means the opposite. If we take religions as a specific case of cultural difference, there is no apparent contradiction in combining the moulding effect of one specific religion for a city (Catholicism for Rome) with the burgeoning of religious diversity in the same place.

Finally, super-diversity in Rome, from a spatial point of view, refers to an articulated and complex stratification and partial overlapping of layers from hyper-local to global. If super-diversity were able to open up new opportunities for multifaceted identities to meet and exchange, as we hypothesize, this condition potentially seems to configure Rome as an overexposed space for post-secularism. The postsecular condition that this article explores involves a complex interaction of communicative spheres that may be synthetically represented as two spaces: the first space is composed of secularism and religiosity, while the second space involves different religions. In these two spaces, actors confront, debate and communicate in the public sphere. The fact that religious communities and social places both strive to keep their own identities alive and well – locating them, of course, in the Italian cultural, social and geographical context – guarantees the common will to make that space of diversity survive in Rome, while possibly triggering virtuous – and not necessarily hostile – relationships and mutual reconfiguration between the secular and

the variously religious and spiritual. According to our data and analysis, Rome is definitely a clear case of religious super-diversity. To what extent that diversity is a precursor of postsecular social life in terms of values and deeds is something that remains to be further explored in future research.

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**Note on the Authors**

VALERIA FABRETTI earned a PhD in sociology in the program entitled 'Social Systems, Organizations and Public Policy Analysis'. She teaches Sociology at the University of Rome 'Tor Vergata' and she is a research fellow in Sociology at the Department of 'Social and Economical Sciences' of the University of Rome 'Sapienza'. She is a member of the 'Centre for the Study and Documentation on Religion and Political Institutions in Postsecular Society' (CSPS). Her studies mainly regard pluralism and the governance of cultural and religious diversities in public institutions and social spaces. Her recent publications include: *Learning from religions. Post-secular Schools and the Challenge of Pluralism*, in 'Italian Journal of Sociology of Education', n. 2 2013; *Dealing with Religious Differences in Italian Prisons: Relationships between Institutions and Communities from Misrecognition to Mutual Transformation*, in 'International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society', volume 28/1 2015. Email: [valeria.fabretti@uniroma2.it](mailto:valeria.fabretti@uniroma2.it), [fabretti.v@gmail.com](mailto:fabretti.v@gmail.com)

PIERO VERENI is associate professor of cultural anthropology at the University of Rome 'Tor Vergata' and contract professor of Urban and Global Rome at Trinity College – Rome Campus. He did fieldwork in Western Greek Macedonia (1995-97) and the Irish land boundary (1998-99). He is now working on fatherhood and globalization in Rome. His publications include: "Foreign Pupils, Bad Citizens. The Public Construction of Difference in a Roman School", in *Global Rome: Changing Faces of the Eternal City*, edited by B. Thomassen, I. Clough Marinaro (2014); "Cosmopolitismi liminari. Strategie di identità e categorizzazione tra cultura e classe nelle occupazioni a scopo abitativo a Roma", *ANUAC*, 4, 2: 130-156 (2015). Email: [pietro.vereni@uniroma2.it](mailto:pietro.vereni@uniroma2.it)

